



Florida House of Representatives

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Johnnie Byrd
Speaker

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HOUSE OPENS 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida House of Representatives convened today in the 106th Regular Session since statehood in 1845. The session is scheduled to last sixty days.

The historic opening day was highlighted with tributes to the U.S. Armed Forces and Florida National Guardsmen serving in combat. The House also welcomed back Representative Carey Baker (R-Eustis) who recently returned from a one-year tour of duty in Iraq. Representative Baker serves in the Florida National Guard.

Speaker Johnnie Byrd (R-Plant City) addressed the House, outlining his hope for a visionary 60-day session and goals in five policy areas: domestic security, health care, fiscal restraint in budgeting, passage of parental rights legislation, and campaign finance reform.

“There are times when our decisions will not be unanimous, but that shouldn’t prevent us from being united,” said Speaker Byrd. “There are times when our path of action may not be popular, but that shouldn’t keep us from being principled.”

The speech highlighted real Floridians speaking on the issues most important to them. These included the following:

PUBLIC SECURITY:

Lee County Sheriff Rod Shoap commented on the unprecedented interagency coordination on the state and local levels since 9/11. He thanked the Legislature for setting the pace and giving local law enforcement the tools they need to secure the homeland.

PARENTAL RIGHTS:

Todd & Robin Carr of Nassau County spoke about the importance of parental rights in raising their four daughters and one son and the imperative for action on the parental notification law. Mr. Carr is a youth pastor at First Baptist Church of Callahan (Fla.).

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY/FLORIDA’S ECONOMY:

Bill Stanton, Executive Director of the Jackson County Development Council, discussed the importance of ongoing economic incentives authorized by the Legislature. Such incentives led to the locating of a Family Dollar Stores Distribution Center in the county which is expected to bring 425 new jobs.

HEALTH CARE:

Suan Grant, an Alzheimer's caregiver whose husband lost his battle with the disease talked about research and the importance of support for caregivers. She thanked legislators for their attention to the issue.

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Note: The Legislature meets annually in Tallahassee, the seat of Florida's state government. The Florida House of Representatives is composed of 120 members (81 Republicans, 39 Democrats).